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# MOLINISM'S FREEDOM PROBLEM: A REPLY TO CUNNINGHAM

William Hasker

Arthur Cunningham has asserted that my argument targeting the “freedom problem” for Molinism is unsuccessful. I show that while he has correctly identified two minor (and correctible) problems with the argument, Cunningham’s main criticisms are ineffective. This is mainly because he has failed to appreciate the complex dialectical situation created by the use of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. The result is to underscore the difficulty for Molinism of the freedom problem.

Molinism faces at least two major problems. One is the well-known “grounding problem,” the problem of specifying the facts about the world that ground the truth of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (or CCFs). In spite of intensive efforts, no facts of the requisite sort have been found. Probably the best response for the Molinist is to deny the requirement: in this case, and perhaps in some others, truth does not, and need not, supervene upon being.<sup>1</sup>

The other problem does not have any widely recognized name; I propose to call it the “freedom problem.” It is argued that, if we initially assume the existence of true counterfactuals of freedom, it can be shown that the actions covered by the counterfactuals are not in fact free in the libertarian sense; thus, the so-called “counterfactuals of freedom” are not that after all. This argument has been developed in a series of articles by me, David Hunt, and Robert Adams.<sup>2</sup> Arthur Cunningham has replied in this journal to the most recent version of the argument,<sup>3</sup> and this is my response to him. Readers will not be surprised to learn that I do not think Cunningham has succeeded in refuting the argument, but his article has many features of interest that demand a careful reply. He does point out two places at which my argument is flawed and needs to be strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup>See Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” Hasker, “The (Non-) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals,” Merricks, *Truth and Ontology*, Flint, “Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate.”

<sup>2</sup>See Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 39–52, Hunt, “Middle Knowledge,” Adams, “An Anti-Molinist Argument,” Hasker, “A New Anti-Molinist argument,” and Hasker, “The (Non-) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals”; for replies see Flint, “A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument” and “Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate.”

<sup>3</sup>Cunningham, “Where Hasker’s Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong.”



His article also prompts some reflections about the dialectical context in which our discussion takes place. One of his objections triggers the formulation of an interestingly different version of the argument. And, finally, his view opens up the question concerning what view of free will is consistent with Molinism. So there is a lot here that we need to discuss.

I begin by giving here the argument as it is found in my most recent statement of it.<sup>4</sup> An important notion for this argument is the idea of an agent's "bringing about" that a proposition is true. This notion is defined as follows:

(BA) A brings it about that Y iff: For some X, A causes it to be the case that X, and  $(X \& H) \Rightarrow Y$ , and  $\sim(H \Rightarrow Y)$ , where "H" represents the history of the world prior to its coming to be the case that X.

(" $\Rightarrow$ " expresses strict (broadly logical, or metaphysical) necessitation; " $\rightarrow$ " is the connective in the subjunctive or counterfactual conditional.) The argument first sets out to establish that, under certain circumstances, Molinism implies that it is in an agent's power to bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about her.

1. Agent A is in circumstances c, the counterfactual of freedom " $C \rightarrow Z$ " is true of her, and she freely chooses to do z. (Molinist premise)
2. A is in c, and it is in A's power to refrain from doing z. (From (1) and the definition of libertarian freedom)
3. It is in A's power to bring it about that: A is in c, and A refrains from doing z. (From (2))
4. If it is in A's power to bring it about that P, and "P" entails "Q" and "Q" is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that Q. (Power Entailment Principle (PEP))
5. (A is in c and refrains from doing z)  $\Rightarrow (C \rightarrow \sim Z)$ . (Molinist premise)
6. If it is in A's power to bring it about that A is in c and refrains from doing z, and " $(C \rightarrow \sim Z)$ " is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that  $(C \rightarrow \sim Z)$ . (From (4), (5))
7. It is in A's power to bring it about that  $(C \rightarrow \sim Z)$ . (From (1), (3), (6))

Now, if it could be established that it is *not* in an agent's power to bring about the counterfactuals of freedom about her, we could derive a contradiction and thus falsify the Molinist premises of the argument. Note that according to (BA), if the agent is to bring about the truth of a counterfactual  $(C \rightarrow X)$ , it must not be the case that  $(H \Rightarrow (C \rightarrow X))$ . That is to say, the counterfactual must not be entailed by the world's past history.

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<sup>4</sup>Taken with minor modifications from "The (Non-) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 31–34.

But although Molinists will and must deny that the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history, I believe that there are, all the same, compelling reasons for saying that such counterfactuals, were they to exist, would indeed be entailed by that history. What features must a state of affairs possess in order to qualify as a genuine part of the world's history? This question has proved difficult to resolve conclusively, but one extremely plausible sufficient condition can be stated as follows: A fact is a part of the world's history if it has had causal consequences prior to the present time. Facts that have such consequences are, so to speak, embedded in the world's past, as part of the causal processes leading up to the present. If we assume, as I think we must, that the past is inalterable, then it is out of the question to suppose that those causal processes could now be made different in any way. Facts that have thus become part of the world's history do not "float free" from the concrete objects and events of the world's past in the way that—to take a hypothetical example—the election of a Democratic majority in the U. S. Senate in 2020 floats free from the events in 2016 about which we learn on the evening news. Now, from the Molinist perspective divine foreknowledge does not have any such causal consequences. But divine middle knowledge, unlike foreknowledge, is not causally impotent. On the contrary: God's middle knowledge is part of the "prevolitional" knowledge by which, prior to deciding upon his act of creative will, God knows what the full consequences of any particular decision on his own part would be. Indeed, God's decision about which creative act of will to perform (as Plantinga would say, about which possible world to weakly actualize) is crucially guided by his middle knowledge; that, in fact, is the whole point of the Molinist conception of providence. In the light of his middle knowledge, God surveys the creative options available to him, and selects the one that is most pleasing and most in harmony with his ultimate purposes for his creation. Middle knowledge is intimately involved in the process by which the world comes to be as it is; it is causally relevant in the highest degree. God's consideration of the counterfactuals of world-actualization is an integral part of the divine creative action, and is thus inescapably a part of the world's history. Contrary to the Molinist claims considered above, "H" does entail " $C \rightarrow X$ ," where " $C \rightarrow X$ " is a true counterfactual of freedom. But if this is so, then we created free agents do not bring about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom about us; there is no possible world in which we do this. Now, what we do in no possible world, is impossible for us to do, and does not lie within our power to do.

Given this, we are now able to add three additional steps to the argument given earlier. The steps are as follows:

8. Any true counterfactual of freedom is entailed by the world's past history. (Argued for above)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>This additional step in the argument is added here to facilitate reference later on.

9. It is not in an agent's power to bring about the truth of the counterfactuals of freedom about her. (From (8), and the definition (BA))
10. It is not in A's power to bring it about that  $(C \rightarrow \sim Z)$ . (From (9))

But this, of course, contradicts step (7), and the argument as a whole is seen to be a *reductio*. Therefore unless some other assumption of the argument can be refuted, we must assume that one or both of the Molinist premises (1) and (5) are false, and if so Molinism itself cannot be true. This, then, is the argument Cunningham has undertaken to refute.

Before examining his refutation, it will be helpful to make some general remarks about the dialectical situation. Cunningham refers several times in his article to "what Molinism is committed to." In context, this conveys a somewhat inaccurate impression of what I am attempting to do with my argument. It suggests that I am claiming to take only propositions explicitly endorsed by Molinists, and to derive a contradiction from those propositions. Now, I would be delighted to be able to do this, since if I were so able this would secure an immediate and complete victory in the debate for the anti-Molinist view. But life, and especially philosophy, is seldom that simple. What I actually do is take some Molinist assertions, combine them with other propositions which seem to be evidently true, and from that combination derive an inconsistency. This means, of course, that the Molinist can defend her view by contesting the additional propositions that have been added to those derived from explicit assertions of Molinism.<sup>6</sup> I see no way to avoid this, so it means that the argument is unlikely to be as effective as one might wish in laying the controversy to rest. That's just life in philosophy!

There may also be a question about the status of the Molinist assumptions I accept from time to time in my argument (such as (1) and (5) above). The answer, in brief, is this: I accept Molinist assumptions for one purpose only: as provisional assumptions, to see what can be logically inferred from them. This does not mean that I myself accept them or believe them to be true. Furthermore, the fact that in one context I have accepted such propositions does not mean that I can be held to them in any other context.

There is yet another interesting feature of the dialectical situation that will become important in what follows. There are certain implications that flow from the nature of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that have an effect on what it takes to refute such an argument. More on this later, however.

With these matters out of the way, we proceed to Cunningham's objections. As will be apparent from what is stated above, I anticipated resistance, on the part of the Molinist, to my claim (Premise 8) that true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history and that we therefore cannot bring about their truth. (Thomas Flint objected

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<sup>6</sup>In the past I have suggested that premise 8 is the most likely point of disagreement, and I still think this is the case. But disagreement, from Molinists and others, need not be limited to this premise.

to this in his own response to the argument.<sup>7</sup>) Cunningham, however, is willing to accept those claims, at least provisionally, though he points out some lacunae in my argument for them. A first objection is that, in order to license the claim that *it is not in our power* to bring about the truth of the counterfactuals of freedom about us (9), it must be a *necessary truth* that the true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the world's past history—but it is not stated that Premise 8 is a necessary truth. I accept this; I was in fact thinking of that premise as a necessary truth, and this should have been stated explicitly. (Even if someone does not think premise 8 is true at all, it should not be difficult to see that if it were true its truth would be necessary.<sup>8</sup>) In order to make things clear, my Premise 8 can be replaced with Cunningham's

(PAST) *Necessarily*, all true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world.<sup>9</sup>

So far, then, so good.

However, Cunningham raises a more troubling point about (PAST). He points out that some Molinists (including Molina himself) have affirmed divine timeless eternity, and this would seem to provide a counterexample to (PAST). The CCFs have their causal influence, after all, as ingredients in the divine decision concerning which possible world to actualize. But given divine timelessness, the locus of that decision is not our temporal past but rather God's timeless eternity. This, I acknowledge, is something I had overlooked. I was thinking of versions of Molinism in which God is temporal (this, I believe, is the view most commonly taken by contemporary Molinists), so the implications of divine timelessness in this connection just did not occur to me. Cunningham suggests a remedy for me: "Hasker could respond by saying that by 'past history' he means the *causally prior* history of the world rather than its *temporally prior* history."<sup>10</sup> I think this is on the right track. Let me put it like this: the "history" in question is the *causal history* of the world, which includes not only all events of the world's past but also events (if there are any) not located in the past which have causally affected the world's past and present state. Although I do not myself affirm divine timelessness, I wish to be able to use the PEP and the notion of "bringing about" in contexts where divine timelessness is assumed; so this modification should be understood to apply both to (PAST) and also to the definition (BA). With these repairs, the

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<sup>7</sup>See Flint, "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist argument," 300–304.

<sup>8</sup>My informal argument in support of Premise 8 is completely general; it makes no use of contingent propositions which might be true in some worlds but not in others. So the argument, if successful, arrives at a conclusion which is true in all possible worlds—in other words, a necessary truth.

<sup>9</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 204. Cunningham has two other logically equivalent formulations of this principle, but the one cited will suffice for our purposes.

<sup>10</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 206n16.

argument for (10) seems solid—and Cunningham apparently is willing to accept it.

Cunningham's serious opposition, on the other hand, is reserved for my argument for (7). In this he disagrees sharply with Thomas Flint, who has said, "it has never been in dispute that, given Hasker's final account of 'bringing about' . . . the Molinist is committed to (7)."<sup>11</sup> Cunningham, however, demurs, and offers two objections to that stage of my argument. The first objection targets (4), the power entailment principle (PEP)—or rather, it targets the argument I gave in support of (4).<sup>12</sup> I provided a sketch of a proof for the PEP, as follows:

According to (BA), if A, by causing it to be the case that X, were to bring it about that P, and 'P' entails 'Q,' then by that very same action A would bring it about that Q, provided that  $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ . But if 'Q' is in fact false, it cannot be entailed by H, so ' $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ ' is true. So if A by causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that P, and  $P \Rightarrow Q$  and  $\sim Q$ , then A by causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that Q.

Now suppose that A has the power to bring it about that P by causing it to be the case that X. It follows, trivially, that A does have the power to cause it to be the case that X. But it was shown above that A's causing it to be the case that X would bring it about that Q—always assuming, of course, that  $P \Rightarrow Q$  and  $\sim Q$ . Which is to say: If it is in A's power to bring it about that P and 'P' entails 'Q' and 'Q' is false, then it is in A's power to bring it about that Q. *Q.E.D.*<sup>13</sup>

In his criticism of this proof, Cunningham focuses on my assertion,

But if 'Q' is in fact false, it cannot be entailed by H, so ' $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ ' is true.

He points out that

in the first half of the proof, where this bit of reasoning occurs, it is not a factual but a *counterfactual* scenario that is under consideration. The aim of this portion of the proof is to show that *if A were to bring it about that P*—something that, by hypothesis, A does not actually do—*A would thereby also bring it about that Q*. Establishing the truth of this counterfactual requires showing that *A brings it about that Q* is true, not in the actual world, but in the nearest possible world  $W^*$  in which A brings it about that P. And that of course requires showing that the conditions specified in definition (BA) for the truth of *A brings it about that Q* are satisfied in  $W^*$ , rather than in the actual world.

He goes on,

According to (BA), one necessary condition for the truth of *A brings it about that Q* is that *the past history of the world by itself does not entail Q*. Obviously this is what Hasker takes himself to be showing in the line presently under

<sup>11</sup>Flint, "Whence and Whither the Molinist Debate," 40.

<sup>12</sup>It should be pointed out that refuting the argument for PEP would not necessarily refute PEP as such. The power entailment principles (there are several of them) preceded the proof by a number of years (see *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 104–115), and I believe they enjoy considerable intuitive support quite apart from the argument discussed by Cunningham.

<sup>13</sup>Hasker, "The (Non) Existence of Molinist Counterfactuals," 31n12.



scrutiny. But here is the crucial point: to show that this condition is satisfied in  $W^*$ , Hasker must show that *the history of  $W^*$*  does not entail  $Q$ . That is to say, what Hasker needs to establish is not that  $\sim(H \Rightarrow Q)$ , where " $H$ " represents the history of the actual world, but rather that  $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$ , where " $H^*$ " represents the history of  $W^*$ . . . . What is more, we can show that, given (PAST), the required condition  $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$  is not true in general. In fact, it is definitely *false* in just the sort of case that matters for Hasker's purposes, namely the special case in which  $Q$  is a *counterfactual of freedom*. We are assuming, for the sake of argument, the truth of (PAST):

*Necessarily*, all true counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world.<sup>14</sup>

We know that  $Q$  is true in  $W^*$  (since  $A$  brings it about that  $P$  in  $W^*$ , and  $P$  entails  $Q$ ). Let us assume that  $Q$  is a counterfactual of freedom; then by (PAST), the history of  $W^*$  entails  $Q$ , i.e.  $(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$ . So in this case  $A$  brings it about that  $Q$  is *false* in  $W^*$  (since  $A$  brings it about that  $Q$  is true in a world only if that world's history does *not* entail  $Q$ ). And since  $W^*$  is the nearest possible world in which  $A$  brings it about that  $P$ , we can conclude: if  $A$  were to bring it about that  $P$ , thereby ensuring the truth of  $Q$ ,  $A$  would *not* thereby bring it about that  $Q$ , if  $Q$  is a counterfactual of freedom.<sup>15</sup>

The reasoning here is complex and subtle but it is not, I submit, convincing. First of all, Cunningham is missing the point when, in assessing my proof, he asserts that I need to establish "that  $\sim(H^* \Rightarrow Q)$ , where ' $H^*$ ' represents the history of  $W^*$ ." Cunningham goes wrong here because he is failing to understand the sense of "power" as this word is used in the PEP and, indeed, generally in this discussion. The power which, in the second paragraph of the proof, we attribute to  $A$  is the power to cause it to be the case that  $X$  *under the circumstances*<sup>16</sup> that actually obtain, the circumstances in which, by hypothesis,  $A$  actually refrains from causing it to be the case that  $X$ . There are of course other senses of "power," but this is the sense that is relevant for libertarian free will, and in my writings on this subject I have consistently used "power" in this sense. For example, in *God, Time, and Knowledge* I wrote:

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<sup>14</sup>Here I replace another formulation of (PAST) with the one we have already seen.

<sup>15</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 208–209 (all italics in original).

<sup>16</sup>There is a verbal ambiguity here that must be noted so as to avoid confusion. "Circumstances" as used here means the *total circumstances under which a person acts*; it involves the entire "fixed past," the past with which the person's actions must be consistent in order to avoid incoherence. However, the word "circumstances" is often used also for the items comprised in the antecedent of a counterfactual of freedom. It is important to realize however, that *these two uses of the term are not equivalent*. There has been some discussion about what needs to be included in the "circumstances" which form the antecedent of a counterfactual of freedom. But it is clear that the antecedents of these counterfactuals *cannot* include the counterfactuals themselves, nor can they include facts about divine foreknowledge of the truth of the consequent of the counterfactual in question. So if (as is argued here) the history of the world, and therefore the total situation in which one acts, *does* include the relevant counterfactuals of freedom, the two concepts of "circumstances" will definitely come apart. In order to avoid confusion here, I will sometimes use "total circumstances" or "situation" to refer to the overall context in which a person acts.



[T]he power in question is the *power to perform an act under given [total] circumstances*, and not a *generalized* power to perform acts of a certain kind. . . . In general, if it is in N's power at *T* to perform *A*, then there is nothing in the circumstances that obtain at *T* which *prevents or precludes* N's performing *A* . . . Here "prevent" applies especially to circumstances that are *causally* incompatible with N's performing *A* at *T*, and "preclude" to circumstances that are *logically* incompatible with A's doing so.<sup>17</sup>

I am not the only philosopher to recognize that, in the discussion of libertarian free will, "power" needs to be defined along these lines. Thomas Flint, for example, states the following "libertarian analysis of freedom":

An agent is truly free with respect to an action only if the situation in which he is placed is logically and causally compatible with both his performing and his not performing the action.<sup>18</sup>

Given this understanding of power, it follows immediately that the past of the world *W\**, in which A brings it about that *X*, is the same as the past of *W* in which A refrains from so doing. It is not, then, my task to *establish* that the past of the world in which A causes it to be the case that *X* is the same as the past of the world in which he refrains from doing that; this is entailed by the way the situation is set up to begin with.<sup>19</sup>

There remains, to be sure, Cunningham's argument that *given (PAST) and the truth of Molinism*, the pasts of the two worlds would be different. Here, however, I would remind Cunningham that I *do not* accept that Molinism is true, and I am *not* presupposing its truth in my proof of PEP. As noted in my remarks about the dialectical situation of our discussion, when I assume the truth of some Molinist assertion this is done *only* in order to determine the logical consequences of that assertion, and I cannot be presumed to accept the assertion in any other context. So his appeal to these alleged (but controversial) truths in mounting a counter-argument against my proof has for me no force whatsoever. Indeed, Cunningham has not provided any reason for anyone to question the proof, *unless* that person endorses both the truth of Molinism and (PAST).

This might seem to be a pretty severe limitation on the relevance of Cunningham's argument against the proof of PEP. In fact, however, this is not a problem for him, once we understand the overall strategy of his paper. The key to that strategy is given by the following summary, which appears later in his article:

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<sup>17</sup>Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 67, slightly emended. The original reads, "prevents or precludes N's performing A at T." The words, "at T" imply that the agent might be performing A at the very instant *T*, whereas the intention is to describe the situation *before* the agent is either performing A or refraining from A.

<sup>18</sup>Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," 255.

<sup>19</sup>As will become apparent, Cunningham has his own understanding of "power," which differs from mine. And he is of course fully entitled to this understanding. But if he substitutes his notion of power for mine in discussing my argument, he has changed the subject and is no longer discussing the argument he is supposed to be refuting.

I have shown that if the counterfactuals of freedom are entailed by the past history of the world—that is, if (PAST) is true—then Hasker's argument that the Molinist is committed to (7) fails. On the other hand, if (PAST) is false, then Hasker's argument that the Molinist is committed to [(10)]<sup>20</sup> fails. Either way, Hasker fails to show that the Molinist is committed to both halves, (7) and [(10)], of the intended contradiction.<sup>21</sup>

In view of this, the reader need not accept either (PAST) or Molinism in order to follow Cunningham's argument; it suffices if we recognize, uncontroversially, that either (PAST) is true or it is not. Either way, he claims, my argument has been defeated.<sup>22</sup>

This however comes later; in the meantime, there remains a bit more for Cunningham to do. Given (PAST) and the truth of Molinism, he has undermined my argument for PEP; this does not, however, amount to refuting PEP itself. In view of this he presents a second objection to the first stage of my argument. This second objection is initially similar to the first; what he objects to is my inference from

- (2) A is in *c*, and it is in A's power to refrain from doing *z*.

to

- (3) It is in A's power to bring it about that: A is in *c*, and A refrains from doing *z*.

His objection parallels the one to my proof of the PEP: The assumption is that A in fact does *z*, so the scenario in which A refrains from doing *z* is a counterfactual scenario, and I need to establish (but have failed to do so) that the total circumstances that obtain in the actual world obtain also in the world in which A refrains from doing *z*. And my answer is the same as before: the power ascribed to A in (2) is the power to refrain *under the exact same total circumstances* as those which obtain in the actual world in which in fact he does *z*. So it is not I who need to establish that the circumstances are the same; rather, anyone who maintains that they cannot be the same needs to come up with a proof of this.

Cunningham, however, is happy to oblige: he points out that, given the existence of true CCFs and the truth of (PAST), the history of the actual world contains the counterfactual ( $C \rightarrow Z$ ), whereas the history of the alternative world in which A refrains from doing *z* contains the counterfactual

<sup>20</sup>Here Cunningham wrote "(9)", referring to a slightly different version of the argument.

<sup>21</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 214.

<sup>22</sup>Cunningham goes too far, however, when, later in his article, he refers to my proof of the power entailment principle as a "proof I have already shown to be flawed" ("Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 216). Here Cunningham ignores the nature of the premises he employs to "show the proof to be flawed." As was demonstrated above, those premises are available only to a Molinist who accepts (PAST). They are not available to any non-Molinist such as me, nor are they available to Cunningham himself. (Cunningham has informed me in correspondence that he takes no position on the truth of Molinism; he neither affirms it nor denies it.) These premises, indeed, are not available even to actual Molinists who do not affirm (PAST). Cunningham's dismissal of the PEP is entirely premature.

( $C \rightarrow \sim Z$ ). So it is not the case that the total circumstances are the same in both worlds. And this seems to be decisive; if this step is rejected, the first part of my argument (steps 1–7) fails. At this point, Cunningham's objection seems to have succeeded.

Nevertheless, Cunningham's celebration at this point is premature. To be sure, he is correct in saying that, if (PAST) is false, my argument fails. (There will of course be other arguments against Molinism.) But it is not the case that if (PAST) is true, the Molinist emerges unscathed. To see why, I will present yet another argument. Before doing this, however, I need to explain a particular notion of *impossibility* which will feature in that argument. This notion is the counterpart of the concept of power discussed above. Power, in that sense, is the power either to perform a certain action on a given occasion, or to refrain from that action *under exactly the same total circumstances*. (A person's having that sort of power is crucial for the person's possession of libertarian free will, as understood in this discussion.) The impossibility in view here is the counterpart of that concept of power: it reflects a situation in which, on a particular occasion, the total circumstances either causally prevent or logically preclude an agent's performing the action in question. This is not by any means an obscure or unduly technical notion of impossibility; on the contrary, it reflects the quite familiar situation in which one might like to perform a certain action, but the action in question is made impossible by some past event, often by a previous action of one's own. For example: you have just received an excellent offer for the house you are selling, and would very much like to accept the offer. Unfortunately, you signed an agreement yesterday to sell it to someone else at a lower price, so it is impossible for you to accept the new offer. The circumstance of the previous sale *logically precludes* your accepting the new offer; there is *no possible world* with this same history in which you at this point accept the new and better offer for your house.<sup>23</sup> In order to distinguish this notion of impossibility from others in the vicinity, we shall term this *impossibility in the situation*.

Given this, we can proceed with the new argument:

- I. A is in  $c$ , and it is in A's power to perform  $z$ , and also in A's power to refrain from performing  $z$ . (Molinist assumption)
- II. Either A will perform  $z$ , or A will refrain from performing  $z$ . (from (1))
- III. If A performs  $z$  the counterfactual ( $C \rightarrow Z$ ) is entailed by the world's history. (From (1) plus Molinism and (PAST))

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<sup>23</sup>Note that the previous sale does not *causally* prevent your making the sale. It is physically entirely possible for you to sign a document, promising to sell the property to the new purchaser. Indeed, you may not even know of the earlier sale: you may be afflicted with amnesia, or (changing the supposition slightly) the previous sale may have been executed by some other authorized person, such as your attorney, without your as yet learning of it. In either case, nothing you do now can constitute your selling the property to the new purchaser.

- IV. If A refrains from  $z$ , the counterfactual ( $C \rightarrow \sim Z$ ) is entailed by the world's history. (From (1) plus Molinism and (PAST))
- V. If the counterfactual ( $C \rightarrow Z$ ) is entailed by the world's history, it is impossible in that situation that A will refrain from performing  $z$ . (necessary truth)
- VI. If the counterfactual ( $C \rightarrow \sim Z$ ) is entailed by the world's history, it is impossible in that situation that A will perform  $z$ . (necessary truth)
- VII. If it is impossible in the situation that A will refrain from performing  $z$ , it is not in A's power to refrain from performing  $z$ . (necessary truth)
- VIII. If it is impossible in the situation that A will perform  $z$ , it is not in A's power to perform  $z$ . (necessary truth)
- IX. Either it is not in A's power to refrain from performing  $z$ , or it is not in A's power to perform  $z$ . (from (I)–(VIII))
- X. Molinism is false. (from (I)–(IX), indirect proof)

Upon reflection, this result should not be surprising. Any *reductio* argument (such as my original argument (1)–(10)), contains an inconsistency somewhere (perhaps deeply hidden) among its premises. The logician's task, then, is to construct a series of steps with the result that the hidden inconsistency becomes an explicit contradiction. The order in which the premises are introduced, and the logical operations to which they are subjected, may make a considerable difference to the shape taken by the argument; in particular, they may make a difference as to precisely where the contradiction makes its appearance. But these different ways of conducting the argument should make no difference to the conclusion that is reached. The argument (1)–(10) seems quite different, on the surface, from the argument (I)–(X), but they are in fact different versions of the very same argument; they utilize the same or equivalent premises, and they arrive at the same conclusion. Cunningham, in his attack on my argument for (7), took advantage of the inconsistency among the premises, but the inconsistency remains and can still be used to arrive at that conclusion. The conclusion, of course, is that Molinism has a problem—a rather severe problem—about free will.

I judge that Cunningham's assault on my argument has ended in failure. In the final pages of his paper, however, he takes a different tack. His penultimate section, "Middle Knowledge and the World's History: What's Really at Stake," is an attack on the conception of free will that is presupposed in my argument, and in the discussion in this paper up until now. Yet, Cunningham professes to be a libertarian. If his argument in this section is successful, the anti-Molinist argument we have been discussing becomes irrelevant. We begin by considering a remark that gives us a pointer to his response to the argument (I)–(X). He writes,

So far as I can see, it is *not* an essential commitment of libertarianism that, for some of my actions, the prior history of the world neither entails that I will nor that I will not perform that action. What is an essential commitment of libertarianism is that at least some of my actions are not *causally determined* by events or factors that are not under my causal control.<sup>24</sup>

What Cunningham will reject, then, is the conclusion that if a CCF is entailed by the world's past history, it is not in an agent's power to act in a way that is contrary to that CCF. In general, Cunningham does not accept that the necessity of the past rules out an agent's having the power to act in a way that is inconsistent with what has happened in the past.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, acting in such a way can very well be in the agent's power, so long as it is not *causally determined* how the agent is to act. He states,

Hence a libertarian may accept the following: the past history of the world entails that I will perform a specific action on a specific occasion, and yet I have it in my power to do otherwise on that very occasion. The rational Molinist who grants that God's middle knowledge and God's creative act really do belong to the world's past history will say exactly this about every free action I ever perform.<sup>26</sup>

Applying this to the argument (I)–(X), Cunningham will affirm (I), which asserts that, under circumstances *c*, *A* has both the power to perform *z* and the power to refrain from so doing. What about step (V), which affirms that if *A* is in *c*, and the counterfactual (*C* → *Z*) is entailed by the world's history, it is impossible in the situation that *A* will refrain from performing *z*? It is hard to see how this can be denied, given the notion of impossibility in the situation that was explicated above. It is clear that there is no possible world in which, finding himself in that total situation, *A* refrains from performing *z*. Cunningham must however affirm that, contrary to what is asserted by (VII), it is in *A*'s power to refrain from performing *z*, *even though it is impossible in that situation that A will so refrain*. In doing this, he must reject the concept of power contained in my definition cited earlier, a definition that affirms that if it is in an agent's power at *T* to perform *A*, then there is nothing in the total circumstances that obtain at *T* which *prevents or precludes* the agent's performing *A*. In the situation as described, the counterfactual (*C* → *Z*) does preclude *A*'s refraining from performing *z*, and yet Cunningham insists that so refraining remains within *A*'s power.

But now I have to ask, what kind of "power" is this, a power that it is absolutely impossible that I will exercise? What is the point, what is the benefit, of having a power such as this rather than not having it? If someone is intent on doing me harm, I will have no objection whatsoever to his being supplied with as many "powers" of this sort as anyone is able

<sup>24</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 219.

<sup>25</sup>My thanks to Cunningham for clarifying this point in correspondence.

<sup>26</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 219.

to imagine. What worries me are the powers that he is able to exercise! Anyway, here is the picture: A person lives through many years of her life, making thousands of supposedly free decisions. In each case, one of the opposing choices, to perform an action or to refrain, is entailed by the total situation in which she acts, and the other is impossible for her to perform. Doesn't that sound a lot like determinism?

The point at issue here can't be settled by a stipulative definition for "libertarianism," nor would it be especially helpful to canvass professed libertarians as to their opinions on the question. (Cunningham recognizes that many libertarians would disagree with him on this issue, but he argues that their position should be viewed as "an additional commitment that although shared by many libertarians, is not essential to libertarianism as such."<sup>27</sup>) I suggest that what we need to consider at this point, those of us who consider ourselves libertarians, is: What really matters to us about free will? It can't be merely that my decisions and actions are causally effective in the world; that result can equally well be secured by a determinist. I submit that we should begin by asking: What real alternatives are open to the agent as she considers what to do? What matters most here is that, under the right circumstances, *what an agent decides to do determines the direction of the world; events flow in one way or in another depending solely on that decision*. It is important, to be sure, that the decision is not itself the necessary causal consequence of previous events. But the importance of this lies, not in the causation as such, but rather in the fact that such causation *negates the genuine alternative possibilities with which the agent is confronted*. Cunningham's picture, in which causal necessitation is denied but one of each pair of alternatives is not genuinely possible, gets things precisely backwards. Or so I say; readers must consider this question for themselves.

It is time to summarize. We began by considering my argument that Molinism is incompatible with genuine libertarian free will for creatures. I believe that this argument, slightly amended, nicely survives Cunningham's carefully crafted objections. Indeed, one of the conclusions drawn by Cunningham serves precisely to confirm the argument's main contention. I refer to his assertion that, given Molinism plus (PAST), the agent cannot be free in the sense under discussion: as he puts it, the past of the world in which the agent performs a certain action will of necessity be different than the past of a world in which she refrains from that action.

Given this (perhaps surprising) agreement between us, Cunningham proceeds to raise a further question: whether the conception of free will presupposed to this point is the right conception, the one that is required for libertarian free will. My discussion of this topic is admittedly incomplete; everything hinges on the question, what really matters about free will? My own conviction is that what emerges from the discussion is that

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<sup>27</sup>Cunningham, "Where Hasker's Anti-Molinist Argument Goes Wrong," 220.



Molinism really does have a severe problem in seeking to affirm libertarian free will for creatures.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>For another argument that Molinism is incompatible with a robust libertarianism, see Hess, "Arguing from Molinism to Neo-Molinism."

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